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SUBJECT: NIGER: THE SITUATION IN THE NORTH

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Summary

[11](#). (SBU) A truck hit a landmine south of Agadez on December [15](#). The Nigerien Military has resupplied its garrison in Ifeourane. The MNJ claims the United States as friend based on a VOA stringer's contact with it. The GON is organizing a regional conference on trafficking. A UN consultant has provided information on the use of landmines in Niger. End Summary.

Latest Mine incident

[12](#). (U) A civilian truck carrying commercial goods hit a mine just south of Agadez on the road to Zinder December 4. It does not appear that anyone was killed in the incident.

Nigerien Military relieves Ifeourane

[13](#). (U) A large Nigerien Armed Forces (FAN) convoy reached the beleaguered northern town of Ifeourane the week of 26-30, bringing much needed supplies and fresh troops to relieve the several hundred soldiers there. The vast majority of the civilian population of the town had already left due to shortages of food and other essential goods, as well as security concerns (ref B).

[14](#). (SBU) The details of the resupply mission remain murky. The MNJ has claimed on its web site that the convoy was a failed offensive on the MNJ stronghold at Tezarzeit that suffered significant casualties, including the convoy commander. In an interview with RFI, the GON spokesman said that the convoy was not an offensive, and that it suffered only three killed. A US NGO with operations in Agadez reports that military sources in Agadez have claimed that the FAN had attacked rebel camps in the Mount Tamgak region.

[15](#). (SBU) Comment: All indications are that the convoy's primary objective was to resupply Ifeourane rather than to attack MNJ positions. It appears to have succeeded in that task and has returned to Agadez. We have no independent information on casualties.

MNJ names its friends

¶6. (U) In a November 30 posting on its web site, the MNJ said that the Nigerien people should recognize who their true friends are: the United States and Italy. Those countries are concerned about the Nigerien people, as evidenced by two articles, which the site reprints. The first is a November 11 VOA broadcast titled "Tuareg Rebels Gathering Strength in Niger. The second is an article in an Italian publication.

¶7. (SBU) The VOA item cites Phuong Tran as reporting by satellite phone from an undisclosed location in Niger where she had been traveling with the Tuareg rebels. We have had no contact with Tran, but understand that she is a VOA stringer based in Dakar who entered Niger (probably illegally) from northern Mali.

GON to organize regional conference

¶8. (U) GON officials have long cited a proposal to hold a regional security conference. At a December 4 ceremony, it installed the committee charged with organizing "an International Conference on the trafficking of drugs, arms and cigarettes." The organizing committee will be chaired by the Interior Minister and will include the Ministers of Justice, Foreign Affairs, Finance, Regional Integration, and representatives of a host of Ministries. In his speech announcing the organizing committee, the Prime Minister did not provide details on where the conference would take place, when it would take place, or who would be invited.

¶9. (SBU) Comment: The description of the proposed conference as dealing with trafficking is consistent with the GON's long-standing claim that the MNJ are criminals and bandits.

NIAMEY 00001430 002 OF 002

It also suggests that the conference will not address the grievances made by the MNJ or other rebel groups in the region. However, High Commissioner for Peace Restoration Mohamed Anacko, who is charged with overseeing the implementation of the peace accords that ended the rebellion in the early 1990s, is a member of the organizing committee.

UNDP Mine briefing

¶10. (U) A UN consultant who had been in Niger looking into the use of land mines briefed the diplomatic corps on November 30. Following are key points:

-- From April 14 to November 24 there have been 21 landmine incidents resulting in 78 victims (12 civilians and 66 soldiers), of which 27 were killed and 51 wounded.

-- These incidents have contributed to a 80 percent decline in commercial and passenger traffic in northern Niger, a 40 percent fall in garden crop production and a 100 percent decline in tourism. The tourism losses are estimated at cfa 5 billion (about \$11 million).

-- All landmines known to have been used to date are anti-tank mines. No antipersonnel mines have been used.

-- The MNJ has used old Belgian PRBM3A1 mines weighing about six kilograms. The mines are smuggled in from Chad and cost about cfa 300,000 - 500,000 each (about \$671 - 1,119 at the current exchange rate).

-- There are reports that the mines were provided by Chadians who had been trained in demining some years ago, and are now digging up mines to sell.

-- There are also reports of the use of Italian mines that

are harder to detect than the Belgian mines.

-- FAN chief of operations Colonel Soumaila Garba said that the FAN only uses mines for defensive purposes, although he was unclear as to whether it used anti-personnel mines as well as anti-tank mines. He said that it was no secret where the FAN obtained its mines, but it he did not say where that was.

-- The UN consultant said that no unexploded ordnance had been found, but the French Defense attache said he had photos of unexploded ordinance found near the scene of a June 24 attack at Tezerzait.

-- The UN consultant was in Niger November 11 to December 1. He was not able to go north of Agadez due to security concerns. A vehicle in the convoy in which he returned from Agadez struck a mine on November 24.

MNJ web site

¶11. (SBU) Comment: In the last few weeks the MNJ has increased the frequency of postings on its web site. The tone of the postings have become increasingly shrill. The quality of the French as declined and the postings increasingly resort to hyperbole and the use of large fonts and red ink for emphasis. The web site appears to claim more military success than the MNJ has accomplished, and the bellicose tone may be designed to mask the relatively limited MNJ military actions since the end of its Ramadan ceasefire.
ALLEN